

**Galatians 4: 8-12; “To Be Known By God”, Message # 26 in the series –
“Christ Has Made Us Free”, Delivered by Pastor Paul Rendall
on January 16th, 2022, in the Afternoon Worship Service.**

The apostle Paul is asking a question here, to the churches of Galatia. The question is – How can you go back? After you believers have come to know the Lord through Christ’s grace, how can you go back to the Old Covenant ceremonial law? It really is a good question, not only for the churches of that time, but for many Christian people in our own time. For it is no doubt true that there are many people who profess to be Christians who are tempted to go back to simply “being religious”, rather than pressing on to know the Lord. In this message I want you to understand better the contrast that the Apostle Paul is making here between nature and grace. The contrast is noted by Paul in 2 particular ways. 1st – When people are in the state of nature, they do not know God, and they serve other gods. And 2nd – When they are in a state of grace, they come to know God and are known by Him.

1st of all – When people are in the state of nature they do not know God, and they serve other gods.

Verse 8 says: “But then, indeed, when you did not know God, you served those which by nature are not gods.” Now this is a very interesting verse because if Paul is speaking to Jews as well as Gentiles, it seems to pose a problem to our understanding. That is, the verse would be saying that before these Jews had come to Christ, they had served those things which by nature were not gods. Is that possible? I think that if we study the history of the Jews, even at this time which Paul was writing, we have to conclude that it was true. What we now know from Paul’s letters is this: That the true Church of Jesus Christ is one Church composed of Jews and Gentiles, and one of the reasons that the Apostle Paul had to write this letter was because there were people in both groups which had been deceived into going back to the law and its ordinances.

Some in both groups falsely thought that this was needed to make them spiritual; that is, to observe things of the ceremonial law besides their serving God through Christ and His grace. It seems apparent to me that there were both Jews and Gentiles in the churches of Galatia. The Jews had the law given to them, both the moral law summarized in the Ten Commandments, and the ceremonial law with all of its typical ordinances. The Gentiles not having the law, were a law to themselves because the work of the law was written in their hearts. This is called the law of nature in theology. But whether a person was a Jew or whether they were a Gentile, all were guilty of worshipping other gods if they did not worship God through Jesus Christ His Son. It will be good for us to see that this truth applies to us today. Whether you are a Jew or a Gentile, if you have not believed in Jesus Christ, savingly, you are still in a state of nature. You need to be brought into a state of grace through faith in the gospel if you would be saved.

Let’s look at some verses to prove this to ourselves. First, let’s look at the Jew. Turn with me over to Romans 2, verses 17-24. “Indeed you are called a Jew, and rest on the law, and make your boast in God, and know His will, and approve the things that are excellent, being instructed out of the law, and are confident that you yourself are a guide to the blind, a light to those who are in darkness, an instructor of the foolish, a teacher of babes, having the form of knowledge and truth in the law.” “You therefore who teach another, do you not teach yourself?” “You who preach that a man should not steal, do you steal?” “You who say, ‘Do not commit adultery,’ do you commit adultery?” “You who abhor idols, do you rob temples?” “You who make your boast in the law, do you dishonor God through breaking the law?” “For the name of God is blasphemed among the Gentiles because of you, as it is written.”

Now I hope that you can see here from these words, that if you were a Jew, and you were religious outwardly, observing the ceremonial and the moral law outwardly, but not repenting of

all of your sins, all of this religiosity would not avail you a thing in the sight of God. If you have all the privileges of being a Jew outwardly, Paul says, you would still need to repent of all of your sins, or you would perish in your sins. If you are a Jew, even today Paul is saying, even though you make your boast in God, and know His will, and approve of the things that are excellent, being instructed out of the law, and you are confident that you are a guide to the blind, a light to those who are in darkness, that you are an instructor of the foolish, a teacher of babes, and you even see the Scriptures as the form of knowledge and truth in the law, he says that is not enough. If you teach others the value of keeping the law, and yet you are not perfectly consistent in your obedience at all points, you dishonor God.

Paul is saying that the ceremonial rite of circumcision would only be profitable if you kept the law, and kept it perfectly. But if you are a breaker of the law at any point, your circumcision would become uncircumcision, he says in verse 25. So Paul is saying that their attempts to keep the law were actually a form of false religion. They were worshiping a false god even though they did not know it. It was the god of their own religious reasoning. We can apply this by saying that in the case of religious but unsaved Jews, if they did not teach themselves their own need of repentance they would still perish in their sins.

Why? Because they were making a god of their own, in terms of what they thought God required. Outwardly they may have hated and abhorred idols, but secretly and in their hearts, they were robbing temples. In other words there was inconsistency and hypocrisy in their worship and service of God. And so in verse 28 of Romans chapter 2 Paul goes on to say – “For he is not a Jew who is one outwardly, nor is circumcision that which is outward in the flesh; but he is a Jew who is one inwardly; and circumcision is that of the heart, in the Spirit, not in the letter; whose praise is not from men but from God.”

What Paul is saying here is that the outward observance of the ceremony of circumcision has no inherent power in it to change the heart and make it able to please God or keep His commandments. Instead, every Jew who would know God must believe in Jesus Christ so that a circumcision of their heart will take place. For when a person comes to see the hardness of their own heart by nature, then they see their need of Jesus Christ. Whether that person is a Jew or a Gentile, when they believe in Jesus Christ, the Holy Spirit comes to do a work of circumcision on the heart. But this work that the Spirit does, it is not apart from your consent, or your obedience at all.

Listen to what God says in Jeremiah chapter 4, verses 3 and 4 – “For thus says the Lord to the men of Judah and Jerusalem: ‘Break up your fallow ground, and do not sow among thorns.’ “Circumcise yourselves to the Lord, and take away the foreskins of your hearts, You men of Judah and inhabitants of Jerusalem, lest My fury come forth like fire, and burn so that no one can quench it, because of the evil of your doings.” So, these words are not only describing what many of Jewish people’s hearts were like in that generation of that people. They are describing what a person’s heart is like without Christ’s grace working in it. The heart is hard, and the task of a person who is convinced of their sins, is to break up that hardness, and not sow to thorns.

In New Covenant language, not only did those Jews, then, need to seek to be righteous by repentance and faith in the promise of Christ. Us Jews and Gentiles in New Testament times, also need to do so. These people were commanded to circumcise themselves to the Lord, and take away the foreskins of their hearts. But this spiritual circumcision that they must try to perform was something which could not be done without the Spirit’s power. They had to cut off their sins. They needed to seek to deal with all the tendencies of their sinful hearts, by repentance toward God and faith in His promises concerning Christ. A person who is attempting to do this is pricked in their heart and conscience concerning their sins. They feel shame and loathing of themselves for having committed sins against God. Nothing but the blood of Christ will avail. The Lord’s working in their heart is what they know that they need. If

they will seek the Lord for grace, He will give them grace, and they will be able to renounce their own righteousness and by His power put off the body of the sins of the flesh..

A Jew without saving faith in Jesus Christ, is still in the state of nature. They are uncircumcised in their heart. Again, we can apply this to all of us, Jew or Gentile. Your being religious and observing the religious rituals of your church will not avail you to actually be saved from your sins. A person who does this, or a church or denomination that does this, is worshipping a god of their own making. In the case of these Jews in the Galatian churches, they were attempting to serve God through the carnal ordinances of the ceremonial law. Nowadays in the in the case of the Gentiles who profess Christ, but who believe in a sacramental salvation, they too are also worshipping a God of their own imagination. If they try to hold on to these false practices, and not press on to know Christ better, they will not be able to please God in anything that they try to do for Him. Why? Because they are not giving glory to the finished work of Christ in redemption.

In concluding this point, I want us in our church here, to be able to recognize our need of God's grace in relation to our worship, our repentance, and our obedience all being seen by God and accepted by Him only through Christ, and not because we are engaged in outward spiritual activities. Let us give glory to God for the grace that He has given us. Let us not add things to our worship which are things of our own devising. Let us never promote a sacramental salvation or a works-righteousness mentality. Let us truly believe with all of our heart, that all that we are as Christians, and all that we do, rests upon what Christ has done and is doing for us. It is important to God that we realize that we serve Him in our Spirit and by His grace in Christ.

2nd – When people are in a state of grace they come to know God and are known by God.

Verse 9 – “But now after you have known God, or rather are known by God, how is it that you turn again to the weak and beggarly elements, to which you desire again to be in bondage.” “You observe days and months and seasons and years.” “I am afraid for you, lest I have labored for you in vain.” It appears from these words that the Apostle Paul sincerely wanted to believe that those to whom he was writing were believers. He says – After you have known God, or rather are known by God, how can you turn back to the Old Testament ceremonial observances of the law? He says, however, that in turning back to the weak and beggarly elements, they were not understanding the first principles of Christianity aright.

The first principles of Christianity are found in coming to know the Lord. It is when the Lord takes special notice of you, to save you and to do your good all of your days, and yes, forevermore. When you truly come to know the Lord you see from His word that the righteousness of the law is all fulfilled in Him. Therefore, you are known by God. He is near to you at every point. You don't put your works in the place of Christ's perfect work to justify yourself before God. Therefore, you also realize that that in doing your works to God's glory, you must press on to know Him in proportion to your learning Christ's grace.

When you are known to God, you are known to Him by two things. Your faith in Christ, first of all. And then, second, that you want to have all of your works to be seen by God, in Christ. The reason that you want them to be seen in Christ is so that Christ will get the glory for your all the sanctifying work that He is doing in your heart. Otherwise, your boast is in yourself. And your evaluation is of yourself, as to the progress you are making. But this is not how God would have it. He would have you to be humble. He would have you to boast in the Lord at all times, and give the glory unto Him. The reason that Paul calls the commandments of the Old Testament ceremonial law “weak and beggarly elements”, is because they had no efficacy in themselves to save anyone from their sins, or give to them the power to live a godly life.

They were all intended by God, in His giving of them, to point forward to the coming of Christ and the Kingdom which He came to establish in relation to Christ's church. Paul

diagnoses the churches of Galatia as “desiring again to be in bondage to the weak and beggarly elements. What was he saying? He was telling them that they wanted to hold on to what was old and passing away. Yes, these people in the Galatian churches were desiring to turn back again and place themselves in bondage to the system which God had determined to make obsolete through Christ’s work of fulfilling the law. They really needed to see that ever since Christ fulfilled it, that it was set aside, as to its ceremonies.

There is no need of observing the days of unleavened bread when Christ, the bread of life, and has been broken upon the cross, and raised from the dead. There is no more need to observe the Jewish Sabbaths once Christ had come and rested in the tomb and rose from the dead on the first day of the week. A new creation had come, and so a new day of worship. There was no need to observe the Feast of Weeks and the day of the first fruits when a new grain offering would be brought to the Lord, where they would present a burnt offering as a sweet aroma to the Lord, of two young bulls, one ram, and seven lambs in their first first year; all this to make atonement for their sins. Christ has come, and He fulfilled this law, and every part of that law. His sacrifice is the sweet fragrance in the Lord’s nostrils.

This is why Paul was afraid for them, lest he had labored in vain for them, teaching them all about Christ and what Christ came to bring to them in grace. Similarly, many people in our day desire are more enamored with the ritual ceremonies related to Christ’s birth and His death and His resurrection; more enamored with them, than they are with cultivating their relationship to Him. They place themselves into a similar bondage of attending upon these things, thinking that it is these things which make them spiritual. Then too, some Christians observe days and months and years as well. They will observe the Lenten Calendar of days and weeks, in a ceremonial fashion which is very similar to what was done by the Jews in the days of Paul. They mark off their calendar and wearing ashes on a certain Wednesday of holy week. But is there real repentance from all of their sins?

If Paul were to walk into these churches today, he would say to them – “I am afraid for you, lest I have labored in vain.” The key to knowing God is to realize that through faith in Christ, God has come to know you. And He is working in you and with you to accomplish His purpose. I will close with 1st Corinthians 8: 1-6. “Now concerning things offered to idols: We know that we all have knowledge.” “Knowledge puffs up, but love edifies.” “And if anyone thinks that he knows anything, he knows nothing yet as he ought to know.” “But if anyone loves God this one is known by Him.” This is the same kind of language as Paul has used in our verses in Galatians.

But look at verse 5. “For even if there are many so-called gods and many lords, yet for us there is one God, the Father, of whom are all things, and we for Him; and one Lord Jesus Christ, through whom are all things, and through whom we live.” So let us ask ourselves, in closing, a few questions. Do I love God because He has first loved me, in and through Christ? Am I really living my life to Him? Am I observing the true ordinances which God would have me to observe? Do I observe the Lord’s Day as the Christian Sabbath? Have I been baptized with believer’s water baptism? Am I observing the Lord’s Supper with a church that I have given my testimony to, so that I can join with them in worship and serving the Lord. These are the things which please our God and our Christ. And finally – Do I glory in being known by God?